



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Julio Duran: The role of Impacto

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Image: Julio Duran, courtesy El Tiempo Latino..

Each year, Americans observe National Hispanic Heritage Month from Sept. 15 to Oct. 15. The histories, cultures and contributions of American citizens whose ancestors came from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean and Central and South America are celebrated during this time.

Perhaps many of us don't know who Julio Duran is, possibly because he no longer lives in northern Virginia. But before he returned to his homeland of Bolivia, Duran spent 40 years in this area, many of them in Alexandria publishing the monthly "Impacto." In honor of Hispanic Heritage Month – a term he would probably object to – we'd like to profile him today.

A native of Tarija, Bolivia, Duran had a background in journalism that predated his residence in the United States. After studying journalism at the University of La Plata in Argentina, he founded the "La Tablada" newspaper in La Paz, Bolivia, and co-directed the magazine "Mundo."

Duran moved to the United States in 1971, and began as a free-lance contributor to "El Diario" in 1979. After becoming that publication's Washington correspondent in 1985, Duran started "Impacto" on the side in 1986. A primary motivation for the publication was a desire to change the way Latin America was portrayed in the United States.

He complained, in a Dec. 11 article in the "Washington Post" about the start of "Impacto," that American coverage of its southern neighbors was reduced to drugs and disasters, and that it failed to bring the Latin American community to life. While it sought to bring its readers a broader idea of events in Latin America, at the time Duran claimed he wanted to steer clear of events in El Salvador and Nicaragua, which were involved in civil wars at the time. As Duran put it, "We don't want to take a political stance. We will not take sides."

Looking back on the life of "Impacto," Duran pointed to two main impacts. The first was an editorial that helped bring about a name change for the Hispanic Festival to the Latin American Festival of Washington. The second was encouraging the George H.W. Bush administration to aid Peruvian and Bolivian farmers in finding alternative crops to the coca leaf. He estimated that \$600 million in aid was sent for that purpose.

In 2015, after 44 years in the United States, and after publishing "Impacto" for 15 years, Duran announced that he was returning to his hometown in Bolivia. He noted in an article in "El Tiempo Latino,"





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the largest Spanish language newspaper in the area, that “those of us who come to this land of opportunities bring dreams that rarely come true.”

Yet, he pointed to his publication of “Impacto” as fulfilling his dream in “serving the community for 15 years ... and straightening some concepts about our identity.”

Alexandria, and the Washington area in general, was strengthened by having the voice of Julio Duran in our midst.

“Out of the Attic” is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as “Marking Time” and explored Alexandria’s history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into “Out of the Attic” and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria.